DIVINE PROVIDENCE

RICHARD DOWNEY

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DIVINE PROVIDENCE

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DIVINE PROVIDENCE

By

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Introduction by

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INTRODUCTION

EVEN a casual survey of the field of religion today will reveal two outstanding facts, the progressive fading of any idea of the supernatural, and the almost general acceptance of the mechanistic explanation of the universe advanced by the exponents of philosophies based entirely upon physical science. Despite its essential incongruity the notion of a finite God is seriously discussed by professedly Christian theologians. The "rights" of man are more and more eclipsing any notion of a Being who is Supreme and Absolute. Optimism, not discouraged by the collapse of Nietzsche's "master morality," is striving to eliminate any need for a Divine Providence by making strenuous efforts to banish evil from a universe evolving toward perfection. It mistakenly identifies physical evil as the source of all evil, the only evil, in fact. Moral evil, sin, crime, are all basically the result of physical conditions.

This doctrine is met with everywhere. It is preached from what is still euphemistically

called the "Christian pulpit." In the syndicated counsel columns of metropolitan dailies where clever, well read, cultured, self-constituted spiritual guides undertake to exercise what St. Gregory called "the art by excellence," the governance of souls, this teaching destructive of all dogmatic religion is attractively set forth in polished literary style. The average man can hardly escape its noxious influence. It pervades every department of contemporary life.

While it would be an exaggeration to say that it is weakening the faith of any considerable number of our Catholic people, it is quite true to say that it dulls belief. By obscuring the vivid perceptions of lively faith, it confuses, puzzles, and begets misgivings and doubts. Hence the need for a clear and comprehensive statement of the Catholic doctrine of Divine Providence with its corollary, the solution which reason enlightened by faith offers of the problem of evil, as far, that is, as a mystery soluble only in the beatific vision can be explained to us mortals on earth.

The present time calls for such a statement conditioned by actual circumstance. Dry, theological tracts have no appeal for the mentality nourished by the brilliancy of sensational statement couched in the elegance of idiomatic, un-

technical, accurate language. This is really what the oft called-for restatement of Catholic doctrine means—not that an iota of substantial change is needed: but that what *ubique et ab omnibus,* everywhere and by every one, was taught shall be interpreted to-day so as to be intelligible to the average man.

This is what Dr. Downey has successfully done in the present brochure. In less than one hundred pages he has set forth in masterly fashion the Catholic doctrine of the overruling Providence of an Almighty God. The most abstruse points in that doctrine, and some there are, are yet stated in language simple enough to be intelligible to the ordinary reader. In fact I fancy I am not in error in saying that the man of average intelligence will find here teaching that will commend itself to his common sense because of clearness of thought, lucidity of exposition, precision in expression and comprehensiveness in matter.

I have deliberately used the qualifying word "masterly" to characterize this essay. For every page reveals the thorough grasp of this difficult theme by the author. Evidence of familiarity with the literature of the subject, ancient and contemporaneous, abounds. Fairness in the statement of objections, accuracy in their

presentation, obvious courage in facing them without shirking or minimizing any difficulty should commend this little treatise to any candid reader. Aptness of illustration, acuteness of thought, enhance its value. The entire field is surveyed, every phase is discussed. Here one will find satisfactory reconciliation of the apparent anachronism of prayer and of miracle in the conception of an overruling Providence. Above all here one meets with one of the very best and most convincing elucidations of the nature of evil, and demonstrations of its corollary in the existence of eternal punishment that it has been my good fortune to observe in our apologetic literature.

The references to other issues in this same series testify at once to the sound judgment of the editor and to the fundamental fact of the essential unity of all the parts of Christian doctrine, interdependence of all dogmas.

One finishes the perusal of this little volume with a sense of satisfaction and gratitude. Our reason has been satisfied by the demonstration of the rights of God. Our heart recognizes that love is the only solution of those two great problems, the mystery of sorrow, the mystery of sin. In the eloquent words of Mgr. d'Hulst:[1]

[1] *Conférences de Notre Dame*, 1892, 4th ed.

"Love triumphs over physical evil in making my God like to me in my sorrows. Love triumphs over moral evil in making me, if I so desire, like to God in His holiness." Or in the simple but eloquent words of our author: "It is the love of the free creature, enjoying every faculty of the rational soul, that the love of God desires. Love seeks to be requited, and it is written, "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son." Love then is at once the explanation of God's Providence and the motive for man's resignation to its decrees.

The attentive reader of this brief treatise will because of it be prepared to enter deeply into the Prayer of the Mass of the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost: "O God, Whose Providence is not deceived in its ordering of all things; we humbly beseech Thee, to divert from us anything that might harm us, and bestow upon us all that may be profitable to us."

JOSEPH H. MCMAHON.

New York, July 21, 1928.

"What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men."

Paradise Lost, book i, line 27.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

1. *General Notion and Definition*

Holy Simeon of old proclaimed the child Jesus to be a light to the revelation of the Gentiles who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. How great was that darkness we know from the pages of contemporary secular writers. The Græco-Roman world at large was a temple of idols, in which men sought by degrading rites to placate a venal rabble of gods and goddesses. These deities, for the most part, were regarded by the masses as dread tyrants oppressing humanity from the security of the heavens, and by the leaders of religious thought as, at best, shadowy beings "content to sit aloft and watch the world go round." Many of the philosophers had abandoned themselves to crude materialism, or pronounced the world a cruel jest of Fate.

But it was not so within the narrow confines

of Judea. There, and there only, the worship of the one true God obtained. For it was the peculiar glory of the Jews, throughout their chequered history, amidst the surrounding corruptions of polytheism, the primitive concept of the one true God; the all-loving Father "who provideth for the raven, when her young ones cry to God, wandering about because they have no meat";[1] the personal God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt; the great ruler of all nations, who brought the Philistines, the mortal enemies of the Jews, out of Caphtor, and the despised Syrians out of Kir.[2] It is, above all, his universal providence which distinguishes the God of Revelation from the heartless deities of the cultured heathen and the tribal gods of the untutored savage.

The word "providence" is derived from the Latin word *providere*, which means "to look before," "to make provision," "to take heed for the future." In its widest sense, then, providence pertains to the moral virtue of prudence, of which it is generally held to be the principal part, since the other two parts, remembrance of the past and understanding of the future, are merely its helpmeets in furnishing the grounds of decision. It is the aim of the prudent man to

[1] Job xxxviii 41. [2] Amos ix 7.

act circumspectly, in harmony with the dictates of right reason, so as to avoid extremes and attain to the golden mean. The first thing that a prudent man does is to co-ordinate his past experience and appraise the present situation in the light of that judgement. His next step is to look forward and make provision for what is coming, according to his resources; in other words, he orders things to an end in view. This ordering of things to an end is the precise function of providence.

Clearly, it involves the forming of a plan on the part of the intellect, and the carrying out of that plan on the part of the will. Since it entails the employment of both these faculties, it has been variously defined, sometimes from the standpoint of the intellect, and sometimes from the standpoint of the will. Thus, St Thomas Aquinas stresses the part played by the intellect when he says: "Providence is the divine reason itself, seated in the supreme ruler, which disposeth all things";[1] whilst St John Damascene emphasizes rather the function of the will, when he defines divine providence as "the will of God by which all things are ruled according to right reason."[2]

There is no discrepancy here, but merely a

[1] *Summa Theologica*, I, q. xxii, a. 1.
[2] *De Fid. Orth.*, i 3.

difference of point of view. The first definition is from the more logical standpoint of the divine plan to be put into operation, the second from the more practical aspect of the actual carrying out of the plan. Briefly, however, we may define providence as the divine governance of the universe, in accordance with the solemn pronouncement of the Vatican Council: "God watcheth over and governeth by his providence all things that he hath made, reaching from end to end mightily and ordering all things sweetly."[1]

The Catholic Church teaches that the world in which we live, and of which we are part, is no mere plaything of some celestial order of beings, nor a work of such inferior worth that it has been abandoned by its architect, nor the mechanical product of impersonal evolutionary forces, nor yet the outcome of some aimless chance, but the ordered achievement of the Creator, who owes it to his own infinite wisdom so to direct and govern it that it may attain to the fulfilment of his divine purpose.

2. *The End or Aim of Divine Providence*

Providence, then, is simply the divine ordination of all created things to an end. But to what end? Reason and revelation unite in assur-

[1] Sess. iii, c. 1.

ing us that the final goal, the ultimate end, to which all created things tend, cannot be anything in the things themselves. The objects of our daily experience are neither self-contained, self-sufficient, nor self-supporting. No created being is of such a kind that its non-existence is unthinkable, for the simple reason that no created being has a necessary grip upon existence. We may survey the whole universe without finding an entity which is in itself a sufficient reason for its own existence. Everything in Nature is at once the cause and the effect of other things. The greatest of created things at the highest provides only a partial explanation of anything.

To suppose, then, that any one of these things, or the sum-total of them all, is its own end, the harbour, so to speak, of its own ceaseless quest, is about as sensible as, to borrow Aristotle's illustration, the supposition that the art of shipbuilding is in the timber of which the ships are made. Even unaided reason leaves us in little doubt that the final end of the great conspiracy of Nature must be the glorification of the Creator. Hence the Vatican Council has declared: "If anyone shall say that the world was not created for the glory of God, let him be anathema."[1]

[1] Sess. iii, c. 1, can. 5.

On this point the inspired writers of Holy Writ speak with no uncertain voice. "The Lord hath made all things for himself," says the author of the Book of Proverbs; whilst in the Apocalypse of St John we read, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord God." St Paul declares that "of him, and by him, and in him, are all things." [1] The supreme purpose of all created things is set forth by the Psalmist in the verse, "The heavens show forth the glory of God." [2] The final consummation of the designs of divine providence is thus depicted by St Paul: "Afterwards the end, when the Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and the Father . . . when all things shall be subdued unto him, then the Son also himself shall be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." [3]

It is, then, the function of inanimate Nature to manifest the glory of its maker; much more, obviously, is this the function of animate Nature with its greater capabilities, ever-widening till we reach rational Nature itself, creatures endowed with intellect and will, mortals made in God's own image. It is the daily lesson of our lives that nothing created can ever fill the

[1] Rom. xi 36. [2] Ps. xviii 1.
[3] 1 Cor. xv 24-28.

heart of man. Each and every one of us has at some time or other set his heart on the attainment of some one thing; we have felt that if we could only attain to *that*, whatever it was, we should be perfectly happy. And, perhaps, we have had the good fortune to gain our heart's desire. If so, we have not been perfectly happy; disillusionment has followed swift and sure; we have discovered that, after all, it was not *that* that we wanted, but something else, and the ceaseless search begins all over again.

"We were made for Thee, O Lord," says St Augustine, "and our hearts are restless till they find peace in Thee"—restless as the river on its way to the ocean. From the infinite we came and to the infinite we tend. It is perfect happiness that man desires, a happiness which this world cannot give, the secure enjoyment of an unending bliss which cannot slip from his grasp, the everlasting possession of God.

However, it is not as though man's happiness were the all-important matter, and the enjoyment of God merely a means to that end. Far from it. Man's enjoyment of God in the Beatific Vision lies precisely in the knowledge that his union with God contributes to God's greater extrinsic glory. Hence says Holy Writ: "The Lord hath chosen thee this day to be his peculiar people . . . to make thee higher than

all nations which he hath created, to his own praise, and name, and glory."[1] So, too, in the New Testament, St Paul writes to the Ephesians of God the Father, "who hath predestined us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the promise of his will, unto the praise of the glory of his grace."[2] Again, the Apostle prays for the Philippians, that they may abound in charity and be filled with the fruit of justice "unto the glory and praise of God."[3] Finally, the end and object of creation is admirably expressed in the salutation of the four-and-twenty ancients prostrate before the great white throne of the Almighty: "Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honour and power, because thou hast created all things, and for thy will they were and have been created."[4]

In the Book of Job we read how, when the foundations of the earth were laid, the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy.[5] This was the opening chorus of Nature's triumphant hymn of praise, which has been chanted unceasingly ever since throughout succeeding ages, to the accompaniment of the harmony of the spheres. In this mighty orches-

[1] Deut. xxvi 18, 19. [2] i 56.
[3] i 11. [4] Apoc. iv 21. [5] xxxviii 7.

tra every created being plays its proper part, each in subordination to the whole, for there is no instrument too humble to contribute something of its sweetness to the melody of the divine symphony.

Service is the essence of order, and service is the badge of the creature. Man, it is true, is the lord of creation, to whom all else in this world subserves. He can harness the forces of Nature to do his will and contribute to his well-being, but, in accordance with the same law of service, he himself can find happiness only in doing the will of God and manifesting God's glory. This law of service is impressed upon man just as much as upon everything in Nature, "from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows on the wall." The gradation of purpose in the ever-ascending scale of creation, from the lowest to the highest, was set forth in arresting fashion many hundreds of years ago by Lactantius, whose graceful style won for him the title of the Christian Cicero. Rhetorically he declaims: "The world was made that we might be born. We were born that we might know God. We know him that we may worship him. We worship him that we may earn immortality. We are rewarded with immortality that, being made like unto the

angels, we may serve our Father and Lord for ever and be the eternal kingdom of God."[1]

All created things in some way show forth the glory of their maker. Because of his own intrinsic, infinite perfection, God must necessarily do his own will. It is impossible to conceive God as necessitated by anything outside himself, for were he so necessitated, clearly he would be limited from without, and therefore not infinite. Consequently God must, through the immanent necessity of his own unbounded perfection, seek always his own glory—a fundamental truth which has been solemnly defined by the Vatican Council in the proclamation: "If anyone shall deny that the world was founded for the glory of God, let him be anathema."

Not that it is in any way possible to add to the intrinsic glory of that which is infinitely perfect. That glory was complete in the long silent years of God's eternity, so to speak, before the dawn of creation. But in the time-series which begins with the external fulfilment of the creative act there is an outward manifestation of that glory on the part of the myriad creatures which, in manifold ways, reflect the divine perfections. That extrinsic glory may be increased, may be made more manifest; and it

[1] *Institutiones Divinae*, vii 6.

is precisely the greater revelation of that ever-varying glory which is the ultimate end of the universe. The work of his hands must necessarily fulfil the purpose which he has foreordained, for the counsels of the Eternal Father, which are coeval with himself, "reach from end to end mightily."[1]

[1] Wisd. viii 1.

CHAPTER II

THE ATTRIBUTES OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

We may perhaps best present the teaching of Catholic theologians with regard to divine providence if we consider separately the various qualities or attributes which they ascribe to it, and these we may classify under four general headings. The providence of God is said to be:

1. Universal, or all-embracing.
2. Immediate, in that it is God himself who orders and governs.
3. Infallible, or certain in the attainment of its purpose.
4. Uniform, or in harmony with the laws of Nature.

From a study of these attributes we may hope to gain a deeper and clearer insight into the nature and workings of providence.

1. *Its Universality*

To Christian ears there is nothing novel about the view that God's providence reaches as far as his causality, that nothing is too vast, nothing too small, to escape his care. But there have

been philosophers who have said of God what Herbert Spencer said of Nature, namely, that it cares nothing about the individual, but everything about the species.

This curious restriction of the workings of divine providence to the conservation of species bears a distinct family resemblance to the muddled metaphysic of the eighteenth-century Deists in this country. It will be remembered that they so stressed the transcendence of God as to banish him altogether from the detailed working of the universe which he had brought into being. He had, they insisted, made the universe, and then left it to run its own course in accordance with the universal laws which he had imposed upon it at its creation, very much as a watchmaker leaves the watch to its own intrinsic resources.

In these contractile views of providence, both ancient and modern, there is always the underlying assumption that it is derogatory to God to act otherwise than according to heroic scale. The propounders of these theories appear to be of Cicero's opinion that "the gods are careful about great things and neglect the small." Not so the teaching of Christ, who said that not even a sparrow falleth to the ground without the Father.[1]

[1] Matt. x 29.

The highest grade of knowledge about anything is to know it, not merely in its appearances or in its effects, but in its causes. The man who can make a wireless set knows far more about wireless than the man who only listens in. The latter's knowledge is at best superficial, and cannot be compared with the casual knowledge of the man who is able to construct his own instrument. To know a thing in its causes is to know it in its constituent principles, to understand it in the very foundations of its being. Now, since God is the ultimate efficient and exemplary cause of all creation, it follows that he must have the most intimate and penetrating knowledge conceivable of each individual thing, in its very separateness, in the height of its dignity, or in the depth of its lowliness. For God made not only the rolling orbs of heaven, but also the tiniest flower that blows, so that to much of his handiwork we may apply the saying of Virgil, "It is labour bestowed on a trifling matter, but not trifling is the glory" (*in tenui labor at tenuis non gloria*). Indeed, Aristotle has remarked that the nature of anything is best seen in its smallest proportions, and truly the surpassing wisdom of the Creator shines forth with dazzling splendour from the meanest micro-organism.

Huxley uttered a profound truth, more pro-

found than he realized, when he declared that chance is only another name for ignorance. Nothing really happens by chance. Everything in the universe is directed by the all-comprehending divine intelligence to the ultimate end of glorifying God. The so-called irrationality of the universe, of which rationalists speak so glibly, turns out on examination to be more apparent than real. Indeed, it requires a peculiar type of mind to rule out providence on the sentimental ground that a beneficent God would not permit sparrows to be eaten by cats.

Do the devoured sparrows fail to attain their end? It is necessary to distinguish carefully between the proximate or particular end of created things and their final or general end. The particular end may, and oftentimes does, fail to be fulfilled, but not so the general or ultimate end. The particular end of the vine is to bear grapes on every branch, but the gardener may prune away many branches in order to get better fruit. The failure of the particular end here subserves a general good—namely, the provision of more nutritious food for man. And many a hard-hearted farmer has remained unmoved at the tragedy of the sparrows, declaring them to be pests which ruin his crops.

Nature itself checks its own prodigality for the good of the whole, by ruthlessly frustrating

the particular ends of many of its most fertile products. Thus, says Professor J. Arthur Thomson: "A cod has several millions of eggs; if these all developed into codlings and these into cod-fish, there would soon be no more fishing, and that would be the end of the world. There is a star-fish, called *Luidia*—and not a very common one—which has 200 million eggs. Huxley calculated that if the descendants of a single green-fly all survived and multiplied, they would, at the end of summer, weigh down the population of China. An oyster may have 60 million eggs, and the average American yield is 16 million. If all the progeny of one oyster survived and multiplied, its great-great-grandchildren would number 66 with 33 noughts after it, and the heap of shells would be eight times the size of our earth. 'Which is absurd,' as Euclid used to say when (according to Samuel Butler) he was tired of arguing."[1] It is obvious, then, that in many respects Nature is cruel only to be kind. The particular end must in many cases give way to the general, and there results a hierarchy of divine purpose, according to which everything in creation is directed to the ultimate end for which the universe was brought into being, the extrinsic glory of God.

It is to be noticed, however, that in the ad-

[1] *The Control of Life*, pp. 193, 194.

justment of particular ends to general purposes, in the subordination of the good of the part to the good of the whole, man is not simply on a level with the rest of creation. He ranks above and beyond every other living organism in this cosmos, and immeasurably above the whole inorganic world. All other mundane things are fleeting as "the grass of the field, which is today, and tomorrow is cast into the oven." To man alone, of things of earthly mould, is vouchsafed a life beyond the grave, a conscious existence after the dissolution of the physical compound, a personal immortality. Throughout the eternity which lies beyond the portals of death, the immortal soul of man must glorify God; either in his infinite goodness by union with him in the Beatific Vision, or eternally separated from him in hell, in vindication of his infinite justice.

Essential immortality belongs to God alone, but the soul of man is naturally immortal; that is to say, the created nature of the human soul is such that it has not within it any principle of corruption, and we know from revelation that it is God's design to conserve the soul for ever according to its nature. The soul of man, then, has an absolute value, and not merely a value relatively to the other finite things whose mutual limitation makes up the order of Nature.

It is impossible, then, that the good of man should be subordinated to the welfare of anything else in Nature. On the contrary, the universe and all that it contains are subordinate in purpose to the eternal destiny of man. Christianity assigns him his true place: midway between the extremes of Celsus and Protagoras. The former placed him on a level with the ant, contending that he never rises above the instinctive ingenuity of that insect, whilst the latter boldly declared that man is the measure of all things. The truth is that God made man a little lower than the angels, that he stands at the head of the hierarchy of the universe, as embodying its various perfections, a veritable microcosm. As the poet Herbert has it:

> "Man is one world, and hath
> Another to attend him."

St Thomas Aquinas points out that the providence by which God rules the world is like the providence by which a father governs his family, or a ruler directs a city or state.[1] The father administers everything for the benefit of his wife and children, whilst the ruler's supreme solicitude is for the welfare of his subjects. In both cases the providential care devoted to land, buildings, and business generally is subordinate

[1] *De Veritate*, q. 5.

to, and regulated by, the primary end in view. So, too, is it with God's providential care of the world; everything else is administered for the sake of man, on the principle that the closer the kinship of any created substance to the nature of God, the higher its position in the order of God's providence.

Now God is a pure spirit, and consequently spiritual substances approach most nearly to their maker. Such a spiritual substance is the soul of man. It is not, of course, an immaterial substance altogether independent of matter, as is an angel, since its especial function is to animate the material human body. In fact, it has an essential, a basic, relation to the body, which is not destroyed by the death and decomposition of that body. St Thomas Aquinas emphasizes this point, insisting that to be strictly accurate in our invocation of St Peter we ought to say, not "St Peter, pray for us," but "O soul of St Peter, pray for us," since St Peter was, and will be again, soul and body in one unity. Nevertheless, the human soul in its essence is immaterial, and, in so far, a reflection of the divine nature and a seal of resemblance. Therefore is it at the head of all created things under heaven, an immortal being made in God's own image, to which all else ministers in the hierarchical scale of the universal providence of God.

2. *Its Immediacy*

Furthermore, God's providence not only universal, it is immediate. The Platonists of old distinguished a threefold providence, only one of which pertained in any way to the supreme deity. In this view, the guardianship over material things is relegated to the lesser divinities who circulate in the lower heavens; the affairs of men are left to the slender mercies of demons, powerful beings of doubtful character betwixt the gods and mortals; whilst only purely spiritual beings, in whom there is no admixture of matter, are deemed worthy of notice by the great God himself.

It is surely a significant fact that matter has been the despair, and sometimes the undoing, of every religion except Catholicism. Either it has been glorified and worshipped by the worldly-minded, or it has been degraded and despised by idealists. In pagan systems of philosophy and theology, generally, matter was regarded as a flaw in the handiwork of the gods, the source and the origin of all evil; and consequently from the outset Christianity was open to the charge of materialism.

Because the early Christians cherished the charred remains of the martyrs, they were scornfully described as "cinder worshippers."

This, too, by the Epicureans, who thought it more spiritual to maintain that the soul of man is born with the body, grows with the body, and dies with the body. The Gnostics laughed the Christians to scorn for their belief in the resurrection of the body. Was it not the function of the spirit to purge itself of matter which is its shame? And why, they asked, venerate the mangled bodies of the martyrs, since those bodies, in life and in death, were an ignomy, a hindrance, and a reproach to spirituality? Similarly gibed the Manichæans. Just as they held that God is not great enough to overcome the devil, so, too, they held that spirit is not great enough to overcome matter, which is, and must be for ever in all its forms and phases, ignoble. The Neo-Platonists, likewise, taunted the Christians with the unspirituality of their teaching, with the gross glorification of matter. The same charge is made against the Catholic Church today. It is objected that she is sacramentalist; that she elevates material things—water, oil, bread, and wine—to be actual channels of grace to the souls of men; that she venerates the relics of the saints, and indulges in spectacular rites and ceremonies.

But the fact is that she, and she alone throughout all the ages, has understood the great synthesis of spirit and matter. She sees

that matter is not a flaw in God's handiwork, but a triumph of his power; that spirit can and does glorify matter; and she points triumphantly to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body as the crowning instance of spiritualized matter. And therefore, in the Christian economy, it is not necessary to relegate matter and material things to the care of some demigod. It comes within the scope of the immediate providence of the infinitely perfect Creator.

Nevertheless, there are certain intermediaries in the workings of divine providence, not because of any defect in God's power, but because of the abundance of his goodness. St Paul describes the angels as "ministering spirits," and the Fathers depict them as assisting in the divine governance of the universe, as having charge of countries, provinces, cities, families, and individuals. But this guardianship of the angels is exercised in the carrying out of the all-embracing plan of divine providence, subject, as it were, to God's immediate supervision. The angels, like earthly kings and princes and rulers, are all part of the eternal design of God's providence, all powers and principalities sustained within the hollow of his hand.

However, it would seem as though God, through intermediaries, governs the world from afar, after the manner of the lord of the vine-

yard mentioned in the Gospel, who let out the vineyard which he had planted to husbandmen and himself went into a far country.[1] In interpreting this parable, the Fathers see in the absence of the master a reference to the fact that God no longer spoke to the children of Israel face to face; for though with them he was no longer visibly present. So, too, though God may seem to us to have withdrawn himself from the actual governance of the universe, in reality this is not so. St Paul calls upon us to realize that God is "not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and are."[2] He is present, though unseen, and present in such a vital way that our very continuance in being at every moment is dependent on him.

We are inclined to think of creation as a past benefit, very much as we think of a plaything of our childhood as something which was a boon to us then, but which has long since passed out of our busy lives. And yet, assuredly, creation is not static; it is essentially dynamic and kinetic. It is a ceaseless act, for the work of conserving things in being is a prolongation of the act by which they were brought out of nothingness into being. "My Father worketh until now, and I work,"[3] says our Blessed

[1] Matt. xxi 33. [2] Acts xvii 27.

[3] John v 17.

Saviour; whilst in the Old Testament we read: "How can anything endure, if thou wouldst not? or be preserved if not called by thee?" [1] In the Psalms, the work of creation is depicted as going on uninterruptedly: "Thou shalt send forth thy spirit, and they shall be created: and thou shalt renew the face of the earth." [2]

Creation, then, in Holy Writ, is represented as a continuous act involving a direct divine influence on the very being of the creature, in such a way that, without this divine influence, the creature would simply cease to be at all. We are literally sustained in being at every instant by the divine power and providence, without which we should lapse into sheer nothingness. We are as dependent on the act of God as the spinning celluloid ball in a shooting-gallery is dependent on the jet of water which keeps it revolving in position. If the jet cease for the fraction of a second, the ball drops; if God's sustaining hand were withdrawn, we should collapse, literally, out of existence.

However, this sustaining influence is not a new act, or rather a multiplicity of new acts, on the part of God. He conserves things in being by a continuation of the same act by which he imparts being. The divine conservation is likened by St Thomas to the preservation of

[1] Wisd. xi 26. [2] ciii 30.

light in the atmosphere by a persistent influx from the sun. In the continuous execution of the plans of divine providence there is no change, no succession in the creative act itself, since it is eternal and immutable, though the verification of the creative act, which takes place in time, involves both change and succession in the created object. As the sun is the only source of light to this planet, so God is the only source of conservation to the universe. It is his immediate providence which sustains and governs all.

CHAPTER III

THE ATTRIBUTES OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

(*continued*)

3. *Its Certainty*

We have seen that there are two essential parts of providence, the one pertaining to the intellect and the other to the will, namely, the plan and its execution. Obviously, providence is the more perfect according as its plan is the more far-reaching, and the more faithfully it is carried out. Now the plan of divine providence, since it is the eternal wisdom itself, must necessarily be the most perfect for the end which God has in view.

"The best-laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley," because of the failure of the mouse or the man to foresee what is going to happen, or because, though he foresees correctly, he cannot control the actions of other mortals or of other forces. But God's knowledge extends as

far as the knowable. No thing that is, or ever was, or will be, or could be, is hidden from his ken. "Neither is there any creature invisible in his sight; but all things are naked and open to his eyes,"[1] and consequently his plan must be flawless, all-embracing, and perfect in its minutest detail.

Again, since God is the omnipotent first cause of all, it is impossible that any secondary cause should thwart the execution of his plan. Every action of every free agent in the universe has been foreseen, in all its consequences, by the "searcher of hearts and reins,"[2] and duly taken into account in his eternal counsels. His providence, therefore, is certain, absolutely infallible, in its workings. This, however, does not imply that everything which happens under divine providence must happen of necessity.

Long ago Aristotle, on biological as well as on philosophical grounds, laid it down that the nature of any being is the infallible indication of its end or purpose, and this principle has received the endorsement of many modern psyschologists. Thus, William James's celebrated argument for the immortality of the human soul comes to this, that immortality is grounded in the structure of man; in other words, that the nature of the human soul, being

[1] Heb. iv 13.

[2] Ps. vii 10.

such that it has not within it any principle of corruption, is an indication that it is meant to survive the death of the body. In fact, it is difficult to see how anyone who believes in an all-wise God can think otherwise. God owes it to his own wisdom not to act against the grain of the nature he has established, but in accordance with it.

Consequently, if it be the nature of any created being to act necessarily and uniformly, as, for instance, water seeking its own level, God will order it according to that nature; whereas, if it be the nature of a being to act freely, and therefore in erratic fashion, God will likewise order it accordingly. Failure to grasp this point has been responsible for many frivolous objections similar to that put forward by Cicero, who argues that if God foresees all things, then he ordains all things, and therefore are all things determined by inexorable fate. Consequently there is no room in the world for free will; everything happens of necessity.

To this difficulty St Thomas Aquinas replies tersely that it is not only effects that are foreseen by God, but also causes, and that God foresees free causes acting freely, and necessary causes acting necessarily.[1] To have a perfect knowledge of any agent in its causes is to have a

[1] *Contra Gentiles* 3, xciv.

perfect knowledge of its effects, whether those effects proceed necessarily or freely.

It has been too hastily assumed that self-determination on the part of the creature is incompatible with infallible foreknowledge on the part of God. A careful analysis of the two notions will remove whatever apparent repugnances there may be. Our knowledge of the future actions of a free agent is necessarily conjectural, because our knowledge of the nature of that free agent is very imperfect. But it is a matter of personal experience for each one of us, that the better you know a man the more easily can you predict what he is likely to do in any given circumstances. Now God knows that man perfectly, in the intimacy of creation, and because of his infallible knowledge of that being in its cause, he has an infallible knowledge of that being in its effects. We are inclined to argue that because our knowledge of the outcome of the actions of free agents is necessarily conjectural, therefore no other kind of knowledge is possible. This is the logical fallacy of going beyond the evidence, the besetting vice of militant rationalists.

Obviously there is no intrinsic repugnance between free action on the part of man, and infallible knowledge on the part of God. To predicate such a repugnance is to make the un-

warrantable assumption that God's knowledge is "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd" like our own.

Again, it has been urged that the certainty of divine providence in its workings is a bar to the utility of prayer, at all events, to the prayer of petition. The objection takes the common form that if God has fore-ordained what is going to befall me in eternity, it cannot make any difference whether I pray or not. Now, clearly, this objection regards prayer as a sort of irruption into the order already established by divine providence, a sort of attempt to upset God's eternal plan. Nothing could well be further from the truth. Prayer is a part, and a vital part, of the order established from the beginning by God's providence. Prayer is just as much a part of the order as are the winds and the waves and the weather. As St Thomas remarks, one might just as well exclude the effects of these every-day causes from the scheme of providence as exclude the effects of prayer.

If God from all eternity foresees that a certain man who does not pray will be damned, and so ordains it, we may rest assured that one reason for that fore-ordination is that God, equally from all eternity, foresaw that the man, in his perversity, would not pray. The oft-quoted line of Virgil, "Cease to hope that the gods' decrees are to be changed by prayer"

(*Desine fata deum flecti sperare precando*), has no point when addressed to a well-instructed Catholic, for he at least hopes for no such impossibility. He prays in the sure knowledge that his prayers have been foreseen by God "before anything was, from the beginning," and that they have been taken into account, as it were, in the divine economy of his marvellous mercies and infinite love.

4. *Its Uniformity*

Finally, divine providence may be described as uniform in that it is in harmony with the laws of Nature. We have seen that God governs everything according to its nature, and so he is said to order all things sweetly.[1] Hence, says Henry Ward Beecher: "Providence is but another name for natural law. Natural law itself would go out in a minute, if it were not for the divine thought that is behind it."

It is sometimes contended that the providence of God which permits miracles runs counter to the basic scientific principle of the uniformity of Nature. But is this so? The principle of the uniformity of Nature has been variously stated by logicians, philosophers, and scientists. Sometimes it is stated as a hypothetical judgement,

[1] Wisd. viii 1.

and sometimes as a categorical expression of a truth of experience. For practical purposes we may state it thus: the same non-free agents acting in the same circumstances produce the same effects. In this statement the sameness is sameness of kind and not, of course, of identity. The same specific causes acting in like circumstances produce the same specific effects. The principle applies only to non-free agents, that is, to physical or natural causes, in contradistinction to the self-determining activity of human beings.

That the law works is obvious; what is not so obvious is the precise justification for making this sweeping fundamental assumption. Pragmatists take their courage in both hands and declare that its only justification is that it does work. Thus, says Carveth Read in his *Logic*: "As the uniformity of Nature cannot be defined, it cannot be proved; the most convincing evidence in its favour is the steady progress made by science whilst trusting to it." We may be pardoned, perhaps, for regarding this explanation as being on a par with the better-known one as to why poppies induce sleep, namely, because they possess a certain *vis dormativa*, a certain quality of inducing sleep. Both explanations are satisfactory as far as they go, but, unfortunately, they do not go very far.

Idealists, like Welton in his *Logic*, assert that

the law is a necessary postulate of thought: "The world must be conceived as a systematic totality, with a thoroughgoing interrelation of parts." We can only say that the necessity is not apparent, and that the unity which Professor Welton postulates, not merely a unity of order, but a unity of being, has no shred of evidence in its support. Mill's efforts at justification are admittedly not very successful; in fact, he comes perilously near to a vicious circle when he declares that the law of the uniformity of Nature "is itself an instance of induction, and by no means one of the earliest which any of us, or which mankind in general, can have made."

The scholastic philosophers are on safer ground when they refer the law of the uniformity of Nature to the providence of God. When they are asked why they bank on this uniformity, they reply: Because the all-wise God, who has made the law, will not act capriciously. He has brought about the order in the universe, including the uniformity of Nature, in accordance with his own eternal plan, for the benefit and well-being of man, and he owes it to his infinite wisdom to conserve all things in their courses, "cycle and epicycle, orb in orb."

But, it is objected, that is precisely what he does not do, since by miraculous intervention

he violates the order of Nature. Has not Hume declared, in our own tongue, that "a miracle may be accurately defined as a violation of a law of Nature by a particular volition of the deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent"? We may at once dismiss the invisible agent as a *bêtise* on Hume's part, since it does not require the erudition of Macaulay's schoolboy to know that a miracle can be worked by God alone. But the essential accuracy of this definition has been persistently questioned outside the narrow circle of professed rationalists and, of late years, even within it. Most theologians are at pains to explain that a miracle is not a violation of a law of Nature, but a sensible effect wrought by God beyond the ordinary course of Nature.

Now the effect of a divine action may well be beyond the scope of the ordinary powers of Nature, and yet not be a violation of the laws of Nature. For instance, accurate, detailed prophecy of remote future events is certainly beyond the ordinary mental powers of man, but by no means contrary to them. When Isaias foretold certain incidents in the Passion of our Lord, he was vouchsafed a vision of future events which were part of the eternal present to the divine intelligence. Surely in such case there is no violation of any law of Nature,

psychological or physical. What happens is that, for the time being, the first cause uncaused supersedes a secondary cause, and produces a result beyond the power of the latter.

Mill, in his *Logic*, expresses the view that the laws of Nature ought to be stated as *tendencies* to uniform action. Thus, the law of gravitation in its most general form reads: "All bodies tend to move towards each other." Many causes other than miraculous intervention may prevent bodies actually exerting mutual attraction on each other; but nevertheless the *tendency* remains. Or, again, take the thermodynamical law: "If one part of a body be at a higher temperature than another, heat tends to travel from the part of the higher temperature to that at the lower." It is sometimes a matter of vital importance, a matter of life and death, to prevent this law actually operating, but it is impossible to eradicate the tendency to operation. Clearly, the law which admits of no exceptions, which cannot be violated, deals with *tendencies*, with the natural properties of things, and not with their extrinsic effects. And the natural tendencies of all created agents remain unchanged, even when there is miraculous intervention. That intervention does not change the nature of any mundane agent, though it may suspend, alter, or increase, its normal external effect. The

supreme cause operates in place of the subordinate cause.

Thus when God preserved the three youths from harm in the fiery furnace,[1] the flames still retained their tendency to burn matter; in fact, they did burn the Chaldean ministers who stood close by. In the case of the youths, the tendency did not pass into action, because the operation of the secondary cause, fire, was in that case superseded by the action of the first cause uncaused, which is the cause of all else. It cannot be said that here there is a violation of the law of the uniformity of Nature. This becomes clear if we only attend carefully to the wording of the law, which states that the same non-free agents acting in the same circumstances produce the same effects. Now, obviously, the fire of the furnace was not acting in the same circumstances when it attacked the Hebrew youths, who were protected by God, and the king's ministers, who were not. In the same circumstances, when there is no casual intervention, flames of fire will always consume human flesh; but where the first cause of all intervenes, the circumstances are certainly not the same, and consequently the law does not apply. It is a case outside the law altogether. There is no violation either of the general law of the

[1] Dan. iii 93, 94.

uniformity of Nature, which applies only in its proper sphere, or of any particular law governing the tendencies of any particular body, since those tendencies remain unaffected by miraculous intervention. And hence Huxley, in his *Essay on Hume*,[1] says: "The definition of a miracle as a violation of the law of Nature is in reality an employment of language which cannot be justified."

[1] P. 129.

CHAPTER IV

PROVIDENCE AND THE EVILS OF LIFE

1. *The Nature of Evil*

THE chief objection against the providence of God has always been drawn from the existence of evil in the world. It has taken many forms, from the classical dilemma of Epicurus, that Omnipotence could, and Benevolence would, have prevented evil, to the naïve question put by Friday to Robinson Crusoe, "Why does not God kill the devil?"

During the Great War one frequently heard it said, and occasionally found it stated in print, that, when the war was over, there would be, either no religion at all, or a completely revised and up-to-date religion, from which all idea of a benign providence would have vanished. It was felt by many noble-minded men that, at the crucial moment, Christianity had failed, and failed ignominiously. Why, we were asked, if God is infinitely good, did he permit that devastating war, bringing unutterable anguish

to countless thousands, who had always striven to serve that God well and faithfully? Christianity seemed to have no satisfactory answer to offer. In the blood-welter the forces of evil appeared to have triumphed.

And yet the war, with all its attendant horrors, was only the newest form of the problem of evil. War or no war, it is always with us. Even in the piping times of peace it stares us in the face daily from the columns of the newspaper; earthquakes, shipwrecks, train disasters, air tragedies, famines, pestilence—why does God permit these things, bringing so much sorrow and suffering in their wake? Or, to come much nearer home, how is it that each one of us is called up to endure so much misery from the cradle to the grave? It has been well said that man enters this world with a cry of pain upon his lips and leaves it with a groan. Or, again, think of the thousands of hapless infants who are born into this world every day diseased, deformed, or mentally deficient, and thus sadly handicapped at the outset for the stern struggle of life. The evils are real enough; they loom as a cloud of witnesses against the providence of God, darkening the heavens from view.

Every system of philosophy, every religion, that has ever existed from the dawn of creation down to the present day, has had to face the

problem of evil, and try to triumph over it in its manifold guises. If we are really to grasp the problem, and perchance find a theistic solution wherein evil is reconciled with the providence of God, our approach to the problem must of necessity be through its philosophical and historical implications.

Talleyrand is reputed to have said that the purport of language is to conceal thought. This witticism seems to be particularly applicable to the language of philosophy. The difficulty is always to get at the thought at the back of the language, and certainly it is not lessened by the fact that each philosophical school considers it necessary to have a language of its own.

However, if due allowance be made for the peculiarities of expression of different philosophical schools, there is a striking unanimity amongst them, with regard, at all events, to the *nature* of evil. It is thus possible for those who are poles asunder in their general outlook on "Nature, red in tooth and claw" to approach the problem of evil from a common standpoint.

It is, I think, universally admitted—in fact, it seems to be evident—that evil is not a thing in itself, but rather a condition of a thing. It is impossible to have a bad chest for instance, without first having a chest; a moment's reflection makes it obvious that the badness is merely

a condition of the chest. Furthermore, this condition implies the absence, rather than the presence, of something; in this case, the absence of a sound state of lungs. For evil is essentially a negation, and not a positive entity. Even Schopenhauer, who made of evil not only an active, but a dominant, principle, when he came to a metaphysical analysis of it, defined it as a negation, or rather a privation, in the will which fails to attain its object.

In the last analysis, then, evil will always be found to consist in the privation of good, in much the same way that a shadow on the ground consists in the privation of light. The shadow cast by a great tree appears to be real enough; it seems to occupy space, and to move from one place to another. Yet, obviously, it has no real existence of its own; it merely marks the spots from which the rays of the sun are excluded by the tree. The shadow is, in fact, simply the absence of light.

So, too, evil, no matter how positive it may appear at first sight, is in essence the privation of good. Confusion arises from the fact that, in many minds, evil is identified with pain, which is most assuredly not a mere negation, but something very positive indeed. Yet, paradoxical as it may sound, pain is not in itself evil; it is merely the evidence of the existence of evil. It

is Nature's warning signal that something is amiss.

Consider, for instance, the pain of a troublesome tooth. The pain arrests attention, and goads one to seek relief from the malady of which it is only the symptom. To that extent, pain is positively good, and, furthermore, many writers, ancient and modern, have pointed out the compensating values attaching to pain. Oftentimes it has been the discipline of great souls, and the school of character and personality. By the general psychological law of contrasts, it enhances the pleasure of physical and mental well-being. Its alleviation affords opportunities for the practice of heroic virtues; in fact, pain has much to its credit.

But my present point is that, philosophically, it is not evil, and ought not to be confused with evil. Clearly, in toothache, the evil, of which the pain is the evidence, is not something positive at all, but the absence of something that ought to be present, namely, the ordinary healthy functioning of the tooth. Cancer, too, with its accompanying agonies, is rightly regarded not merely as a positive malady, but as something very aggressive, greedily eating away the human flesh on which it fastens. Yet the evil of cancer consists ultimately in the absence of the proper structure of the flesh affected. Or

take the case, oft-quoted during the war, of a bleeding wound full of shrapnel. The evil in the wound is not the excruciating pain, nor the shrapnel, nor the lacerated flesh, nor the life-blood gushing forth, but simply the absence in the flesh of the normal relationship of tissue to tissue which Nature ordains.

Evil, then, (1) is never a thing in itself, but a condition of a thing; and (2) it is never positive being as such, but a privation of being. Hence it has been variously defined as, "the non-existent"; "the absence of being as silence is the absence of noise"; "the privation of good"; and by St Thomas Aquinas as "the deficiency of some good which ought to be present."[1]

2. *Classification of Evil*

Shakespeare makes that wiseacre Polonius, who is all for nice distinctions, remind us that the drama is divided into "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical—historical-pastoral, scene undividable or poem unlimited." What Polonius has done for the drama, others, with a mania for meticulous classification, have done for evil. To follow

[1] *Summa Theologica,* I-II, xlix, a. 1.

them is to lose oneself in a maze of words, so I will confine myself to the admitted broad distinction of evil into metaphysical, physical, and moral.

Since evil is essentially negation, it follows that every deficiency, every privation, every limitation is in a way evil. It is in this sense that the Scripture says: "None is good but God alone."[1] Only the infinite, which knows no limits, knows no evil. Every finite being, precisely because it is finite, is to that extent evil. But here we are speaking only of metaphysical evil. "Metaphysical evil," says Leibnitz, "consists simply in imperfection," and that imperfection is nothing more than failure to attain to the ideal standard, on account of the mutual limitation of finite entities. Thus, the land limits the sea, and the sea limits the land; the hills limit the valleys, and the valleys limit the hills. It is precisely this mutual limitation of all the parts which gives stability to the whole, and makes the earth habitable by man.

For it is this limitation of the forces of Nature by counteraction—*i.e.*, metaphysical evil—which results in what we call the order of Nature. Thus, the alternate rising and falling of the waters of the ocean is limited by the relative position of the moon and, in a lesser degree,

[1] Luke xviii 19.

of the sun, in such a way that a regular order results, and we are able to draw up a fixed table of the tides. Yet all limitation, in itself, as something restricting the plenitude of being, whatever be the benefits resulting to man therefrom, is from the metaphysical standpoint evil, in so far as it is the deficiency of some good, of some ideal perfection.

However, were there no evil other than metaphysical evil, there would be no problem of evil to harass us. "Metaphysical Evil," says Harper, "is only called such analogically; and, in this manner, is predicated of the limitation of finite Being. But, as this limitation is not a privation, but a simple negation, and is only called evil by an analogy of proportion, it is wisely disregarded."[1] The problem is concerned only with those privations which result in consequences disagreeable to man. Man rarely suffers in silence, and so we hear a great deal of the problem of evil, but very little of the corresponding problem of good.

This fact was not overlooked by Hobbes, who remarked in satirical vein: "Every man calleth that which pleaseth, and is delightful to himself, good; and that *evil* which *displeaseth* him." [2]

[1] *The Metaphysics of the School*, by Thomas Harper, S. J., vol. i, p. 541.

[2] *Human Nature*, chap. vii.

The problem of evil, properly so called, arises from the fact that, wherever the order of Nature is violated by man, consequences unpleasant to himself are bound to follow. King Canute, seated on his throne at the water's edge, commanding the flowing tide to ebb, succeeded only in getting his feet wet. The boy who stood on the burning deck did not live to tell the tale; whilst we all know the very sad fate that befell the young lady of Niger who went for a ride on a tiger. Wherever the established order of Nature is disturbed we have what Aquinas describes as "the evil of wrong-doing." But the suffering which the disturbance entails has the nature of a penalty, and is therefore described as "the evil of punishment." One of the earliest lessons we learn is that if we violate the order of Nature, some one, usually oneself, must suffer.

Just as there is a physical order resulting from the mutual limitation of the forces of Nature, so, too, there is a moral order, a normative system of conduct resulting from the harmonious balancing of such impinging regulative ideas as justice and mercy, truth and humility, or, in the Aristotelian ethic, of such extremes as cowardice and rashness, prodigality and meanness.

It is universally admitted that there is a moral order, though there are wide differences as to its nature, ranging from the independent morality of Kant to the utilitarianism of Mill. However, in any system of ethics, an infringement of the accepted order is regarded as moral evil, the evil of wrong-doing, and it carries with it, in some way, the evil of punishment.

Now the Church has condemned the distinction between philosophical and theological sin, between an offence against one's rational nature and against God, as erroneous, rash, scandalous, and offensive to pious ears.[1] The teaching of Catholic theologians is that a morally bad act which violates the order of natural reason necessarily violates also the divine law. For, says Billot, "the dictate of conscience, essentially and from the very nature of the case, involves knowledge of the divine law as the source of moral obligation, and consequently it is metaphysically repugnant that a man who does not know God, or who does not advert to his law, at least in a general way, should have any consciousness of a morally bad act."[2] Actually and in practice there is no such thing as a purely philosophical sin which is not also theologically a sin. Where there is consciousness of a morally

[1] Denzinger, 1290.

[2] *De Peccato*, p. 27.

bad act there is consciousness of the transgression of the law of God. "The strength of sin is the law," says St Paul.[1]

The point is of great importance in considering the workings of divine providence, for it means that moral evil is always something which runs counter to the will of God. Consequently, that God should permit moral evil at all seems incongruous, and constitutes a special difficulty which we shall consider presently. Again, if moral evil is always an offence against God, and not merely against oneself, we begin to see the reasonableness of vindictive, and not merely corrective, punishment for sin. By moral evil, then, we mean sin, which is defined by Billot, following St Thomas, as "a human act deprived of its due rectitude,"[2] its due rectitude comprising conformity with right reason and with the law of God.

We may classify evil, then, as metaphysical, physical, and moral. So far, in considering the nature of evil and its classification, we encounter no great difficulty; but as soon as we enquire into the *origin* of evil, and seek to find the cause, or it may be the culprit, responsible for it, we are wellnigh deafened by the din of contending parties.

[1] 1 Cor. xv 56.

[2] *De Peccato*, p. 19.

3. *The Origin of Evil*

1. Dualism is the earliest method of accounting for the existence of evil. In this system all things are classified as good or evil, and then traced along distinct lines to separate ultimate sources. Thus in Zoroastrianism, which flourished in the sixth century B.C., all good proceeds from Ormuzd, the infinite light and supreme wisdom, whilst all evil comes from Ahriman, the principle of darkness. We find the same dualistic conception in Manichæanism, in which the Father of Grandeur was held to preside over the realm of light, and the Father of Darkness over the realm of gloom. Each was supreme in his own domain.

In this way the problem of evil was dramatized, but not really faced. However, dualism escaped the necessity of attributing evil in any way to the god of light and goodness, and its convenient shelving of the problem of evil is held to have been one of the causes of the rapid spread of Manichæanism in the third century of the Christian era. The advance of exact philosophical thought dealt a death blow to all such fantastic theories of the origin of the world. Cultivated reason recognized the absurdity of the crude conception of two infinites.

From the mere fact that each must have something that the other has not got, in order to differentiate them, it was recognized that one must be limited, and therefore itself to be accounted for. Hence the dualistic theory as to the origin of the universe, since it did not account for the origin, was abandoned.

2. But the abandonment of dualism does not necessarily imply the acceptance of a monistic origin of the universe. Between the two there is a pluralism which postulates a number of distinct and independent sources of being, variously described as souls, selves, or monads. No one of these is infinite. Each is struggling for fuller realization and greater perfection throughout many successive existences. Consequently, pluralism is enabled to fall back on the theory of the pre-existence of souls when confronted with the problem of evil. The champions of pluralism never tire of telling us that they are free from the necessity of attributing evil, in any way whatsoever, to God. It is not he who originates evil propensities in the human soul, they say; these propensities are merely the result of misdemeanours in previous existences. The soul that suffers from physical or moral evil in this life is being purged of the delinquencies committed in an unremembered, but lurid, previous life.

So far, so good. But, for one difficulty which the theory of pre-existence removes, it creates a dozen others. Are we to suppose that, at the end of each terrestrial existence, the human soul is detained in a sort of vacuum till it can be born into a suitable body, as a member of just the right family, in all the appropriate circumstances for its future development, and for its adequate punishment on account of previous misdemeanours? And what is the use or meaning of it all, when the soul, in each successive existence, is blissfully unconscious of its prenatal good or bad deeds? The best that can be said for metempsychosis, or the transmigration of the soul from one body to another, is that, like many another fantasy, it is incapable of philosophical disproof; surely no great merit in the entire absence of any positive evidence for such an elaborate attempt to render an all-ruling providence unnecessary.

On philosopihcal grounds alone, most consistent thinkers have been driven into some form of monism, in the sense of a system which seeks for the origin of the universe and all that it contains, in a single principle. And at once the difficulty presents itself, that to that single principle, in some way, all evil must be traceable. This embarrassment is deftly evaded by those monists who regard the ultimate principle as

impersonal being; but it will be found on examination that the non-theistic solutions to the problem of evil offered by materialists, idealists, and agnostics alike, are in reality merely restatements of the problem in esoteric terms. It is the old device of solving one difficulty by making another. Impersonal being, which is absolute, or unrelated, or unconditioned, or unknown, explains nothing, for the simple reason that it, above all else, stands in urgent need of explanation itself. To assign impersonal being as the cause of personal being is about as satisfactory as expecting water to rise above its own level.

4. *Attempts to Dispense with Providence*

(*a*) *Pessimism.*

As typical of modern methods of handling the problem of evil whilst dispensing with God and his providence, and at the same time as affording an excellent approach to our own theistic standpoint, we may consider briefly the rival practical solutions of modern pessimism and optimism.

Pessimism in its origin is neither Western nor modern. It was cradled in the East, long even before the days of Buddha, who first raised it to the dignity of a doctrine. "The thirst for being," says Buddha, "is the origin of suffering,"

and, moreover, there is no way of escape, but by ceasing to exist otherwise than in the impersonal state of Nirvana. Some three hundred years before Christ, the Greek philosopher Hegesias enunciated a proposition which has since become the fulcrum of elaborated systems of pessimism, the proposition that the sum-total of the pains of life outweighs its pleasures. Nor did he shrink from the practical consequences of his philosophy; he openly advocated suicide as the only gateway of escape from the evils of life, till Ptolemy ordered his school to be closed in the interest of public morals.

What subtle connection there may be between poets and pessimism we leave to others to determine, but we have it on the authority of a poet that "our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought"; and, certainly, Heine, Leopardi, Byron, to say nothing of lesser bards, gave a message of persistent pessimism to modern Europe.

But pessimism, as a metaphysical system, is the product of the modern German mind. It owes its origin to Schopenhauer[1] and its development to von Hartmann and Mailaender. During the first half of the nineteenth century Schopenhauer worked up and systematized the material which he had collected from Hindu

[1] A.D. 1770-1838.

religions and contemporary poets, and presented the world with the first attempt at a rational philosophy of pessimism.

Man he regarded as the outcome of a cruel cosmic process. Man alone is capable of fully appreciating the evils and miseries of life. More than that, man himself necessarily adds to them. The will-to-live, the primal instinct of life, is the eternal driving force at the back of all human activity. Because man wills to live under better conditions than his fellows, he becomes sober, chaste, honest; he finds it his best policy to be so. Hence all the natural virtues are directly traceable to this primal will-to-live.

But this same will-to-live is responsible also for the evils of life. It is precisely man's will-to-live, to live under the most advantageous conditions possible, that produces deceitfulness, dishonesty, hypocrisy, murder; in fact, the whole category of the vices. Good and evil alike are traceable to this will-to-live. But in Schopenhauer's contention the evil of life far outweighs the good, its pains outweigh its pleasures. The balance is all on the side of pain, of evil. It is the wost of all possible worlds.

Happiness is impossible until the cause of the evil, the will-to-live, is willed out of existence. The logical deduction from Schopenhauer's

premises would be to abolish the will-to-live by the voluntary surrender of individual existence. Such, however, is not the conclusion of Schopenhauer. He rejects suicide, not as being in any way criminal, but merely as not solving the problem. "He who commits suicide," says Schopenhauer, "destroys the individual only, and not the species." The species is kept in existence by generation. It is generation that must cease. Men and women must cease to propagate their kind. Let the whole human race die out: therein lies the solution of pessimism, in the gospel of blind renunciation and abject despair. There will be an end of evil only when, as Swinburne has it, "this old earth will be a slag and a cinder, revolving round the sun without its crew of fools."

(*b*) *Optimism.*

In opposition to pessimism we have optimism. I do not mean the fallacious metaphysical optimism of Leibnitz, who pronounced this to be the best of all possible worlds, on the abstract principle that there is a sufficient reason for saying so, in that the work of an infinitely perfect Creator must be perfect, not merely for its purposes, but, apparently, in its possibilities. Still less am I alluding to the ro-

seate optimism of Hammerling and Pangloss, who seem to have enjoyed habitually the kind of generous outlook on life which most people experience only after a good dinner. Such views made Schopenhauer forget his manners and say: "I cannot here avoid the statement that to me *optimism*, when it is not merely the thoughtless talk of such as harbour nothing but words under their low foreheads, appears not merely as an absurd, but also as a really wicked way of thinking, as a bitter mockery of the unspeakable suffering of humanity."[1]

I am speaking now of that philosophical system which, in direct opposition to the pessimism of Schopenhauer, hopes ultimately to stamp out altogether the evil which afflicts man: the optimism of Friedrich Nietzsche.[2] He tells us that from his earliest years the problem of evil haunted him, until one day he came across a copy of Schopenhauer's work, *The World as Will and Idea*. It enthralled him. Here at last was someone actually giving expression to the doubts and difficulties which had long surged in his own youthful mind. Here was someone who had an answer to offer. Nietzsche caught the infection of Schopenhauer's enthusiasm only to realize in calmer moments that he was not satis-

[1] *The World as Will and Idea*, vol. i, p. 420.
[2] A.D. 1844-1900.

fied with the latter's anæmic answer, and he himself determined "to blaze a new path."

It is not so much life, as power, that man craves, contended Nietzsche. Life without the power to dominate others in some way would be a feeble thing, and therefore the real primal instinct of man is the will-to-power.

He agreed with Schopenhauer that life at best is but a melancholy adventure, but he would have none of Schopenhauer's renunciation. He set out to become the prophet of defiance.

He impeaches Christianity with being a "slave morality," with preaching an ethic fit only for slaves, an ethic which extols mean qualities, such as obedience, humility, and chastity. Away with it all, says Nietzsche; let us have a "master morality," a morality fit for the lords of creation, who will do exactly as they please, guided only by the prudent caution of selfishness. "The weak must go to the wall," says Nietzche, "and we must help them to go." Only the strong shall survive. In the course of this process, continued through centuries, there will evolve the "superman" who will ruthlessly trample out of existence any evil that may threaten his own happiness.

Such is the solution to the problem of evil offered by optimism. It is, if possible, a worse solution than that of pessimism. For where it

touches the problem at all, it is only to widen it, by giving us more evils to account for, as witness the results of the Great War, which was assuredly brought about by the principles of "master morality."

CHAPTER V

THEISM AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

1. *The Fall and Its Consequences*

BETWEEN these pagan extremes of pessimism and optimism which are reflected in the practical lives of so many men of the world today, there is the time-honoured answer of theism, at its best and fullest as expounded in Catholic theology; an answer which at least has made life liveable for countless thousands.

Both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were of the earth earthy; they never raised their eyes above the earth, never could. "Cease to look beyond the stars for your hopes and rewards," says Nietzsche. With their eyes fixed upon the earth, they sought to solve an eternal problem. Hence the dismal failure of both pessimist and optimist. The solution is not on the earth. It is precisely "beyond the stars" that man must look if he is even to understand the problem. From this earth we have not the point of view necessary to see evil as it really is in itself.

We see it in so far as it affects us at the present moment. From a different point of view we would see it in a totally different light.

A beetle standing on a mole-hill regards every tiny speck of earth as a mountain, a huge obstacle to be surmounted. But a man standing alongside, with an enlarged vision of the whole country, sees the speck of earth in its true perspective. The beetle is too close to that speck of earth, to much harassed by it, to see it as it really is in itself. So, too is it with us. We are like beetles on a mole-hill, too much taken up with the obstacle in our path to see it otherwise than as an obstacle.

A child regards many things as evil which in later life he recognizes as having been good. From the point of view of the child it is evil that he must go to school, must obey his parents; but from the point of view of the grown man it is good that he was made to go to school, made to obey. He is so convinced of it that he insists on his own children going through the same discipline.

From our point of view, evils, very real evils, surround us on every side. But there is another point of view: there is the point of view of the Creator who called all things into being and who watches over them. How the evils appear from that point of view we know not at

present. And yet that is the only point of view that really matters; the only point of view from which evil can be seen in its true character and in all its bearings. "For who among men is he that can know the counsel of God? or who can think what the will of God is?"[1]

But even with our present limited vision we can discern the wisdom of the workings of divine providence, and see at all events that man is largely the architect of his own misfortunes. A slight taste of philosophy, says Bacon, may dispose the mind to be indifferent to the things of religion, but deeper draughts must bring it back to God; and, we may add, to the realization that "he hath made all things good in their time, and hath delivered the world to their [men's] consideration, so that man cannot find out the work which God hath made from the beginning to the end."[2]

In the first place, from the metaphysical standpoint, it is obvious that God cannot be the cause of evil. We have seen that evil is not a thing in itself, that it is not positive being, but something privative. It cannot, therefore, be the object, or the term, of a positive creative act. The result of such an act must necessarily be positive being as such. Just as the sun in the heavens gives light, whilst the shadow on

[1] Wisd. ix 13. [2] Eccles. iii 11.

the ground, the absence of light, is caused by the intervention of some obstacle, such as a tree, blocking out the rays of light; so the infinitely good God is the cause of nothing but goodness, the absence of goodness, wherever it occurs, being caused by the intervention of some creative object, not infrequently by the misuse of free will on the part of man. And hence the contention of the second-century heretics, the Florinians, and the kindred view of some of the Novatians, that God created evil and was the author of sin, came to be abandoned on purely philosophical grounds.

Again, it is clear that God does not directly intend evil as such. In fact, no rational being can desire evil if it be apprehended merely as evil. Whatever evil a man may desire, he does not desire it except under some aspect of good. The drunkard is seeking to drown his sorrows, to while away time, or to produce a feeling of exhilaration; the libertine is seeking pleasure; the murderer is seeking in some way to make smooth his own path in life. All men are seeking happiness, though oftentimes they are much mistaken as to what is happiness. Now God, the infinite intelligence, cannot mistakenly apprehend evil as good; he must needs apprehend it as it is, as evil; and therefore he cannot positively or directly will it or intend it; that is,

will it or intend it under its formal aspect of evil.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, he can intend physical evil as part of the order of his providence, not precisely as evil, but as conducing to the more general good, or the good of the whole order, or the good of man. Death, we are told, entered into the world by sin, and the death of man is intended by God, not as an affliction, but as a punishment for sin. "For God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living," says the author of the Book of Wisdom.[1] Again, in the book of Ecclesiasticus, we read: "Fire, hail, famine, and death, all these were created for vengeance"[2]; that is to say, they are intended by God as punishments for sin, and only under that aspect does he desire them.

God made not death. For, says St Paul, "by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned."[3] The Christian revelation teaches that Adam was created, not in a state of pure nature, but in what is called the state of original justice; that is to say, from the beginning his soul was endowed gratuitously by God with habitual or sanctifying grace, which

[1] i 13. [2] xxxix 35. [3] Rom. v 12.

raised him to a plane altogether beyond the human. Man by nature tends to God as his last end, as the creature tends to the Creator; but sanctifying grace made him a partaker of the divine nature, and gave to him a supernatural end, namely, to see God as he is, face to face, and ultimately to be united to him as to an all-loving Father. Furthermore, man was enriched with certain preternatural gifts, that is, with gifts which did not altogether transcend his nature, but nevertheless were not essential to it. Thus, he was free from the dread of suffering and death, captain of his own soul, with his intellect unclouded and his will untrammelled by the motions of concupiscence.

Adam fell from that high estate, and fell as head of the race. Human nature in its entirety was represented in him, and in his fall we all fell. The supernatural order was broken, and a new order established, according to which human souls, at their coming into being, are deprived of the sanctifying grace which they would have had if Adam had not sinned. With this deprivation of grace, technically known as original sin, went concurrently the loss of the soul's supernatural qualities, capacities, and rights. By his fall Adam and his descendants forfeited also the preternatural gifts of impassibility, felicity, and immortality of body, where-

by he had been exempt from physical suffering, mental worry, and the dissolution of soul and body. Hence, says St Paul, "by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death."

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has redeemed us from the bondage of sin, and restored us to the supernatural order, but there remain with us certain effects and evidences of the fall. The preternatural gifts of Adam have not been restored to us, and man is, as it were, wounded both in the clarity of his intellect and the strength of his will. Consequently, much of the physical suffering endured by man is traceable to the representative sin of Adam, and some of it to the actual sins of ourselves and others. Sin is the root of human suffering.

But though Christ has not merited for us a restoration of the preternatural gifts of Adam, he has made it possible for us to make ignorance, concupiscence, and the physical pains and penalties of sin the occasions of supernatural satisfaction and merit. On this point St Ephraem says: "Man inflicts chastisement in order that he himself may derive some utility therefrom. He inflicts punishment on his servants in order that he may be master of them; but the good God chastises his servants in order that they may be masters of themselves."[1] Furthermore, the dis-

[1] *Carmina Nisib.*, Ed. Bickell, 1866, p. 70.

abilities of human nature which issue in death are at least salutary reminders that "we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come." [1]

Clearly, then, the ills that human flesh is heir to are not attributable to God, but, on the contrary, may become instruments of divine providence in making us "conformable to the image of his Son," [2] so that, having suffered with him, we may be also glorified with him.[3]

2. *Providence and Sin*

With regard to moral evil, in its theological aspect sin, the Council of Trent has solemnly pronounced: "If anyone says . . . that God works evil as he works good, not merely permissively, but properly and for its own sake, so that the betrayal of Judas is the proper work of God just as much as the calling of Paul, let him be anathema." [4] There is abundant scriptural testimony on this point. Thus, says the Psalmist, "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity"; [5] and the prophet Habacuc declares, "Thy eyes are too pure to behold evil, and thou canst not look on iniquity"; [6] whilst in the New Testa-

[1] Heb. xiii 14.
[2] Rom. viii 29.
[3] Rom. viii 17.
[4] Sess. vi c. 6.
[5] Ps. v. 7.
[6] i 13.

ment we read, "Let no man, when he is tempted, say that he is tempted by God. For God is not a tempter of evils, and he tempteth no man." [1] In fact, as we have seen, a special difficulty arises with regard to the divine permission of moral evil, in that it can be perpetrated only by a rational being rising in revolt against the will of God; so that moral evil would appear to be, in its very essence, a thwarting of the divine will which is said to govern the universe.

Yet that God permits sin follows from the fact of his all-ruling providence. Nothing can happen apart from the will of God, that is, apart from either his positive sanction in the case of morally good actions, or his permissive tolerance in the case of morally bad ones. God permits moral evil in the sense that he does not impede it, though he prohibits it by his law. We can see several reasons for this negative permission.

In the first place, God is self-sufficient and altogether independent of the work of his hands. But, so far from being independent of creatures, he would be limited in his operations by the malice of human beings if he were constrained to prevent moral iniquity; or, as some modern philosophers have not hesitated to say, he would be more or less perfect in proportion as he did

[1] Jas. i 13.

prevent it. He would be a kind of limited progressive deity instead of the "Lord God almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come."[1]

In the second place, it is the function of providence to preserve, and not to destroy, the nature of the thing that is governed. In the present actual order, whatever may be said of possible orders, liberty of choice, even between good and evil, is of the nature of the freedom of the rational creature, and because of the perfection of this freedom it must needs be that scandals come.

Thirdly, from the beneficent comparison of good with evil, the morally good is rendered more desirable, just as the brightness of the stars is the more appreciated on account of the darkness of the night. In much the same way, the iniquity of man forms a background for the better manifestation of some of the divine attributes. Who does not see in the divine tolerance of sin the evidence of the boundless mercy and forbearance of God, "patient because he is eternal"?

Finally, it does not pertain to divine providence to bring about the total exclusion of evil from the universe, but to order to some good

[1] Apoc. iv 8.

end whatever evils may betide. In fact, St Augustine lays it down as a principle that God would not permit evil were it not for the consequent good. He says: "For the almighty God, who, as even the heathen acknowledge, has supreme power over all things, being himself supremely good, would never permit the existence of anything evil among his works, if he were not so omnipotent and good that he can bring good even out of evil."[1] The good which may appear to us to be only incidental to the permission of moral evil is in reality a constituent, and a very necessary constituent, of the order of divine providence. God permits moral evil in one case, in order that greater moral good may obtain in another. Thus, St Thomas points out, the wickedness of Nero led to the gaining of many martyrs' crowns.

Now it is obvious that he who perpetrates moral iniquity places himself on the level of the lower order of things which subserve to man's higher good. The sinner by the irrationality of his actions degrades himself to the plane of irrational beings, so that his evil actions become merely the means of bringing about greater good to other men. In this respect the sinner insists, as it were, on ranging himself, not with

[1] *Enchiridion*, c. xi.

men, but with the brutes. But assuredly in some way goodness is begotten of his wickedness. It is precisely in the fact that out of moral evil cometh greater good that we are to look for the basic reason of the divine tolerance of sin.

CHAPTER VI

SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES AGAINST DIVINE PROVIDENCE

1. *The Prosperity of the Wicked*

THAT God should allow the wicked to prosper and the just to be afflicted with calamities is considered by many men to be a special grievance against divine providence. And yet this difficulty was faced and answered in pagan times. Seneca begins his treatise *De Providentia* with the old perplexing question: Why, if there be a providence, are good men buffeted by misfortune, whilst the baser sort go free? And the Stoic philosopher answers in a vein which has won for him the title of the Bossuet of Imperial Rome. After pointing out the difference between maternal indulgence and paternal discipline towards children, he goes on to say that God in his great love for good men exercises towards them a measure of paternal discipline in permitting them to be assailed by adversity.

In the school of adversity they are trained to spiritual hardihood. Do you marvel, he asks, that God, who so loves these men, and wishes them to attain to the best and the highest, should permit them to be so severely tried by ill-fortune? For my part, I do not marvel, says this pagan writer, for the spectacle of noble men successfully combating evil is one worthy of the regard of the deity.[1]

It is too hastily assumed that the just receive more than their fair share of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. That pessimistic contention is by no means supported by facts. Famine, pestilence, and war are no respecters of persons, and are as likely to mow down the impious as the just. The available evidence tends to show that both good and evil fortune are distributed indiscriminately to the godly and the ungodly. As the Scripture has it, your Father who is in heaven "maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust."[2] What happens is that our attention is more easily arrested by the sufferings of the just, since instinctively we feel that the unjust are meeting only with their deserts. But, as Seneca insists, all suffering is not in the nature of punishment; it has its disciplinary and formative value.

[1] *De Providentia*, c. 2. [2] Matt. v 45.

Again, our calculus of pleasure and pain is a very defective one. It estimates only the things that appeal to the senses, and registers nothing of the just man's peace of soul amidst all his afflictions. This point, too, was grasped by the ancients. In answer to the question, Why do many adversities befall good men? Seneca answers: No real evil can take up its abode with a good man, for contraries do not mix. Just as no raging torrents, nor storms of hail, nor the rush of many waters into the sea, can take away or appreciably lessen its salt savour, so the flood-tide of adversity cannot perturb the soul of the just man. Immovable he stands, making all things subservient to himself, stronger within than all else without.[1]

If this could be said of the honest pagan, what shall we say of the Christian who has in his soul the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? His is the peace that passeth all understanding. He may be called upon to spend his life in poverty and, worse still, to see his loved ones bereft of the good things of this world; but, after all, it was not the great God of eternal truth who, pointing to all the glories and splendours of the world, said, "All these will I give thee, if thou dost fall down and adore"; that was said by the devil, the father of lies. Or, it

[1] *Ibid.*

may be that we mourn the loss of one cut off in the flower of his age, by what is called an untimely death; listen to the inspired words of the wisest of men: "The just man, if he be prevented with death, shall be in rest. . . . He pleased God and was beloved, and living among sinners he was translated. He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul. For the bewitching of vanity obscureth good things, and the wandering of concupiscence overturneth the innocent mind. Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time: for his soul pleased God. Therefore he hastened to bring him out of the midst of iniquities: but the people see this, and understand not, nor lay up such things in their hearts: that the grace of God and his mercy is with his saints, and that he hath respect to his chosen."[1]

It was Rousseau who said that if he had no other argument for personal immortality than the prosperity of the wicked and the adversity of the just in this life, it would be more than sufficient to convince him. Instinctively we feel that there is a life beyond the grave where the balance is adjusted. David confesses that he was sorely puzzled by the prosperity of the wicked till the Lord revealed to him their end.

[1] Wisd. iv 7-15.

"I studied that I might know this thing, it is a labour in my sight," says the Psalmist, "until I go into the sanctuary of God, and understand concerning their last ends. But indeed for deceits thou hast put it to them: when they were lifted up thou hast cast them down. How are they brought desolation? They have suddenly ceased to be: they have perished by reason of their iniquity."[1] Truly their prosperity is purchased at a great price. At best it is short-lived, for the day of reckoning fast approaches. We may take leave of this perplexing problem with the profound reflection set forth in the book of Ecclesiastes: "I saw under the sun in the place of judgement wickedness, and in the place of justice iniquity. And I said in my heart: God shall judge both the just and the wicked, and then shall be the time of everything." [2]

2. *God's Tolerance of Evil*

But, it is contended, God does more than merely permit the evil to exist; being omniscient, he must necessarily foresee the evil, and to foresee an evil which you can prevent and yet remain passive is in reality the same as positively to will it. We answer that the result may be the same, but that there is a world of differ-

[1] Ps. lxxii. [2] iii 16, 17.

ence between positively intending to do evil and merely allowing a natural chain of causes to produce its proper effect, even though that effect may be evil, not merely in the physical, but in the moral sense.

Suppose, for instance, that an employer decides to give a bonus of ten shillings to each of his employees; and suppose further that he knows, not indeed with infallible certainty, but with a very high degree of probability, that one of his employees, X, will misspend the money in drink. Nevertheless, he gives the bonus to X, because X is one of his employees. X, having inherited a severe thirst and developed it by practice, does spend the money in drink, and through failure to report for work next morning is summarily dismissed. Whose fault is it that X is dismissed? Is it the employer's because he gave X a good gift which might have been put to an excellent purpose? Surely the culpability rests entirely with X, who abused the gift.

Similarly, God gives to each of us a good gift, the priceless gift of freedom. He knows, even with infallible certainty, whether I will choose good or evil. That infallible foreknowledge no more interferes with my real freedom than the conjectural knowledge of the employer

interfered with the free action of the employee. If I am really free, as my consciousness testifies, I must in honesty place the culpability for an evil choice where it really lies: with myself. Having established a definite order in the universe, it is God's intention that that order shall take its course. It would be utterly unreasonable to expect special interventions of divine providence to avert natural consequences in the physical or moral order because they are unpleasant to man.

At this point difficulties arise on the score that God positively predestines some men to glory, and permissively reprobates others. We have already formulated the general principles underlying the permissive action of God in allowing such evil as the damnation of the wicked. The reconciliation of the efficaciousness of divine grace, on the one hand, and the freedom of man, on the other, is a question which does not immediately concern us here.

St Thomas Aquinas keeps the question of predestination distinct from that of providence, pointing out that these questions differ in two important respects. In the first place, providence is concerned with the universal ordering of all things, whether rational or irrational, good or evil, to an end; whereas predestination

is concerned only with that end which is the principal one of the rational creature, namely, the attainment of eternal glory. The term predestination, then, applies only to men's salvation. In the second place, since not everything that is ordered to an end attains that end, there is a manifest distinction between the ordering and the attainment. Providence is concerned only with the ordering, and consequently by divine providence all men are as a matter of fact ordained to happiness; but predestination is concerned with the outcome, or the issue, of the ordering, and therefore is restricted to those who actually do attain to heaven. Predestination fulfils the same function with regard to the attainment of the end that providence does with regard to the imposition of that end, for the fact that some men do attain to the Beatific Vision is not principally through their own powers, but by the aid of grace divinely bestowed. [1]

In the view of St Thomas, then, the problems of predestination pertain to a different order from that of divine providence. Such problems must be considered apart in the light of the workings of divine grace, and consequently lie outside the scope of this small volume. For a concise exposition of Catholic teaching on the

[1] See *De Veritate*, q. vi, a. 1 in corp.

subject of predestination we refer the reader to Volume XVII of this same series.[1]

Apart altogether from all questions as to the operation of divine grace, the further objection is raised that if God foresaw, even though he did not positively forewill, the damnation of the wicked, nevertheless, as an infinitely good God, he ought to have abstained from creating such souls. A little reflection, however, makes it clear that if God could be influenced in that way by a condition outside himself, the condition would be greater than he; he would be limited, constrained from without, and therefore not infinite, and not God. It would be as though the damned soul, whilst still only a mere possibility, could defy the Omnipotent to create it.

As we have seen, God must of necessity do his own will. This necessity is part of his very perfection, just as it is part of his perfection that he cannot sin. He might, of course, have created a world of intelligent beings in which there would have been no sorrow, sin, or suffering. Why he selected this world rather than innumerable other worlds without, at least, moral evil, we do not know, nor can we know till we attain to the Beatific Vision. And yet we have some inkling of God's providential pur-

[1] *Actual Grace*, by the Rev. Dr. Towers.

pose in his choice of this world. A world without sin would be a world without our present freedom, and a world without this freedom would be a world without love or, at all events, without the freely given love of the creature. When a doctor of the law asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment."[1] For the free rational creature is capable of giving to God a homage which transcends that of every other conceivable work of his hands. And it is precisely this freedom, this perilous gift, which may be so easily abused, which imparts to man's actions their supreme glory or their supreme shame. It is the noblest gift of God to man, so prized that in poetic rhapsody it has been said of it:

"And life itself th' inferior gift of heaven."[2]

It is the love of the free creature, engaging every faculty of the rational soul, that the God of love desires. Love seeks to be requited, and it is written, "God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son. . . ."

[1] Matt. xxii 37.
[2] Dryden: *Palamon and Arcite*, Part ii, line 901.

3. *Eternal Punishment*

But, it is urged, the infinite love of an all-provident God is not compatible with the doctrine of eternal punishment. As this difficulty has been dealt with fully in another volume of this series,[1] it will be sufficient here to indicate the main points in our reply.

1. The sin that consigns to hell is the deliberate uprising of the creature against the Creator, an act of malice perpetrated with full deliberation and free consent. God could no more pardon an unrepentant sinner than an earthly king could pardon an unrepentant traitor.

2. The eternity of hell is, as it were, a corollary to the doctrine of the immortality of the human soul. The soul of man, of its own nature, is immortal: that is to say, it does not in its essence involve any principle of corruption; it cannot lose its individuality, as material things do, by the dissolution of its own parts, or of the parts of any composite substance on which it depends for existence. Thus, a wall ceases to be a wall when its bricks are scattered, and the colours of a soap bubble vanish when the bubble bursts. Not so the human soul. Of its own nature it tends to continue in being, in

[1] No. XXXIII, *Eternal Punishment*, by Rev. J. P. Arendzen, D.D., Ph.D.

full conscious individuality, and we know from revelation that it is not God's intention ever to annihilate it.

If, then, a human soul leaves the body in a state of separation from God, it continues eternally in that state, because of its own natural immortality. It is not as though God specially endowed the soul with immortality in order to punish it for ever; that conceivably might be regarded as the action of a fiend. But such is far from being the case. Man here and now is abundantly conscious of his personal immortality, and of the eternal destiny of happiness or misery that lies before him at his choice.

4. *Conclusion*

Life and death are full of mysteries. "All things are hard: man cannot explain them," says Ecclesiastes.[1] But the fact that man cannot explain them does not mean that there is no explanation. It is an axiom of scientific method that unexplained facts are not to be taken as running counter to established principles. It would be execrably unscientific to suggest that, because certain unexplained facts seem to militate against an established principle, the principle should be called in question, or perhaps

[1] i 8.

even abandoned. Obviously, an explanation must be sought which is in harmony with the known law. So, too, however perplexed we may be at the complicated evils of life, neither our perplexity, nor the evils themselves, constitute an argument against the already established providence of God.

Suppose, for instance, that a prisoner is on trial for his life. Day after day you read the evidence against him; day after day it gets blacker, till you can have no reasonable doubt but that he is guilty of the crime. However, we will suppose further that, on the last day of the trial, he successfully proves an alibi. He was not there when the murder was committed, and so he cannot possibly be guilty of the crime. Nevertheless, all the circumstantial evidence is dead aginst him, and not the ablest lawyer in all the land can unravel its tangled skein. Fortunately for the prisoner it is not necessary to do so, since his innocence is established beyond rebuttal.

So it is with the evils which seem to cry out against the providence of God. We know, can prove, that there is an infinitely good God, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth while he keepeth Israel.[1] The fact that we cannot smooth out all the evils of life to fit in to our satisfaction,

[1] Ps. cxx 4.

and harmonize perfectly, with the providence of God is no argument against that providence, any more than our inability to explain away the evidence against the prisoner proves him guilty of the crime. It is a convincing proof that man's intelligence is very limited, and beyond that it proves nothing. "Only this I have found," says Solomon, "that God made man right, and he hath entangled himself with an infinity of questions. Who is as the wise man? and who hath known the resolution of the world?" [1]

Though the problem of evil remain, to man on this earth, for ever inscrutable, the providence of God shines forth like the gleam of the gold or the flash of the diamond, even from out the wastage and the wreckage wrought by man. Notwithstanding the evils which do abound on every side, and which do afflict us, every healthy-minded man and woman is forced to see that the mighty universe simply teems with the evidences of the infinitely good God who has called it into being, not for our satisfaction, but for his own greater honour and glory.

[1] Eccles. vii 30.

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